

## ALINA BRZOWSKA

Alina Brzozowska

Class 6

Wisznice, Włodawa district

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### My memories of the German occupation

During the German occupation, the living conditions were very difficult. Our school was occupied by German gendarmes, and the children studied in Jewish houses, and in the summer – in one farmer's barn. Very few subjects were taught at school. Even children from higher grades did not learn history or geography.

In 1943, the front line of the Russian army passed by. The preparations were well underway, and we could not sleep at night, because the loud rattling of planes was ringing in our ears all the time. After a few days, we could hear the loud explosions of artillery shells. The German occupiers started to dig shelters to protect themselves from air raids and bunkers in which they could sleep. It lasted until noon, and in the afternoon everything went quiet. My mum and sister went into the woods, where there was quite a crowd of people, and everyone was just trembling with fear. The men started digging a shelter, then covered it with branches and sand, [so] that it was not visible at all. I had a broken leg at the time, so I couldn't walk because it was still in a cast, and the doctor said that I should not put any pressure on the leg, and that I should stay in bed. When everyone was under the tree, we saw the glow of a fire – a heap of straw was burning, and we could hear loud crackling.

Night came, and a light July rain was falling. When the sun went down, the white clouds began to turn silver and dissipate. The moon showed its shy face and hid behind an ashy cloud. Everybody was there in the woods, and every once in a while cows made noise and horses neighed, sending an echo through the forest. Suddenly, we heard one or two branches breaking with a loud crack, and then there was an explosion that made our ears ring. It was a shell that exploded with a loud bang. At that point, everything went quiet – even the cows and horses. Only moonlight lit up the fires, and the rain kept falling. I couldn't sleep, even though I wanted to. Explosions were heard throughout the night, more and more often.

The moon started to disappear and the sun started to rise. Early in the morning, we heard a loud bugle call, commotion and bustle. It was the Germans who were running away, and our Soviet liberators arrived. Suddenly, there was great joy, because the horrible enemy stopped persecuting our country and [the Soviets] managed to drive them away. Angry, when they ran away in panic, they burned and destroyed everything they could. When they encountered Poles returning from Germany to Poland, they tortured and murdered them. But that was nothing – a dozen or several dozen of us died, but their entire country was destroyed and only ruins remained.

Hey, get our enemies, brothers!!